Johnson, Owen V.: Slovakia 1918–1938. Education and the Making of a Nation.

Boulder, New York 1985, XVII u. 516 S. (East European Monographs 180).

Johnson's book is a path-breaking work.

Human biology has an iron law: the old fall off, the young age, and the still younger take the place of their seniors. Slovak nationalistic historiography and journalism after the Second World War were staffed by men who grew up and were educated in the First Czechoslovak Republic. These men did not remember, or only faintly recalled, the Hungarian government and the national persecution of pre-Czechoslovak days. What they knew or did remember, was the Czech supremacy in the common Czech-Slovak state – a supremacy which generated, and is still generating – much hatred in the minds of the newly-bred nationalists, mostly the outcrop of Czechoslovak schools.

Nationalistic scholars, so often followers of the ideology of Hlinka's Slovak People's Party, created, among other legends, the myth of anti-Slovak discrimination in institutions of learning and in employment in education. They also magnified with great gusto the alleged or real discrimination of Slovak intelligentsia in the Czechoslovak administration. Since no exact details were available, and the nationalistic analysts offered seemingly hard-core evidence (in particular Konštantín Čuleň), others, including this writer, have dealt seriously with nationalistic contentions. Johnson has forced us to take a soul-searching second look.

In his dissertation, Johnson has done what a doctoral student should do: he challenged the popularly accepted 'truth', proved its falsity, and set new standards. It may well be that the next Ph. D. candidate will develop a new methodology, invent different data, and undermine Johnson's thesis. But Johnson has set the standard for now and shaken up the existing beliefs.

Slovakia 1918–1938. Education and the Making of a Nation is a mixed bag title which foretells a mixed bag narrative. Mixed, because it does not distinguish between the territory and its inhabitants. As background, Johnson reviews Upper Hungary before it became part of Czechoslovakia, and continues with the central part of the Republic before it became independent Slovakia. The major message, and the alleged innovation of this chapter, claims that the Slovak national movement before Trianon was much stronger than Czechoslovak propagandists would like us to believe. Yet a close look into the published record of Slovak annals turns the innovation into common knowledge; the nationalists no less than the propagandists were interested in minimizing the past in order to glorify the present. It was somewhat inconvenient to

relate to the real situation. Johnson's true contribution is in synthesizing the past, and in publicly exposing the commonly possessed but hitherto hidden information.

In the next chapters, the author develops the main body of his study – the discussion of secondary and post-secondary education in Slovakia, and its impact on the creation of a local intelligentsia. One by one, he describes each element in the educational network in Slovakia, the various secondary schools and training institutions of all kinds, the colleges and the universities. Here he proves his worth. In a diligent research for statistical data, Johnson wandered from town to town, from one archive to another, from one spot of instruction and education to the next. The results are both amazing and enlightening, and carefully interpreted. Johnson points to the scarcity of available data, to the considerable neglect by Czechoslovak authorities in gathering quantitative reports. Therefore, the scholarly efforts are even more praiseworthy, and the results increasingly important.

Slovak politicans of whatever affiliation, whether social democrat and agrarian or non-partisan, worked hard to expand and to strengthen the educational network. There were fewer Czechs in the schools than we have so far been given to believe, and institutions of learning craved for additional Slovak teachers. The Czechs were irreplaceable because of the shortage of skilled educators, and because there was no unemployment. Not "unemployment but . . . perception of underemployment" plagued the Slovak intelligentsia, says Johnson (p. 317). It desired better jobs for its education. Johnson repeatedly returns to this thesis of his. If correct, it should revolutionize our understanding of Slovak nationalism, and in particular, the Hlinka Party's impact on academic youth.

Consequently, Czech scholars, academics, and artists beat the drum to awaken Slovakian intelligentsia while the native sons slept, and left jobs open for strangers, be it at the university, the theatre or with the orchestra. In every place, Slovak skill was needed and welcome, but it was in short supply. On the other hand, positions in education, especially during the depression, were underpaid and unsatisfying.

Johnson is not averse of criticizm, whether overt or covert. The concept of a single, undivided nation ("Czechoslovakism"), the fear of Prague's pedantic bureaucrats, and the display of misleading and harmful nationalistic fanfares, are censured, but the judgement is seldom biting, hardly lashing, mostly "constructively critical" intended to uncover the hidden rather than to strip the bashful.

Besides the praiseworthy, there are also demands and unfulfilled expectations. As mentioned above, Johnson hints at a territory but presents a nation. After all, between the wars, every fifth inhabitant of the country was not Slovak by nationality. Although we often read about the Magyars, Germans, Jews, and others, the portion of the narrative devoted to non-Slovaks covers less than a fifth of the book. While we learn much about background, creation, activity, and the desires of the Slovak intelligentsia, we know little about the Magyars, Germans, Ruthenes (who come out poorly) and others. While Slovak-Jewish clashes inside the university (but not in the streets) are duly recorded, Magyar-Slovak confrontation is very much neglected. The Germanization of the Magyarised youth of Spiš and the thorough Slovakization of Jewish students and pupils are dealt with very limitedly.

True, Johnson often lacks the necessary sources and the linguistic ability – even after Trianon, knowledge of the Magyar language helps in understanding that multinational and multiethnic country. Unfortunataly, one often feels that even distinguished scholars fall into the line of Slovak nationalism of *Slovensko Slovákom* (Slovakia for the Slovaks), and tend to diminish the role of minorities. One believes that the approach to Slovakia (in contrast to the Slovaks) should be territorial rather than national.

Johnson's book should change several accepted assumptions on the modern history of the Slovaks. The projected changes surely trouble those who were accustomed to and pleased that they could say they were being discriminated against, oppressed and downtrodden. Little wonder, then, that Slovak emigrees preferred to ignore uncomfortable volumes like this.

Johnson's book is most welcome. It is an example of a publication in social history which changes the perception in politics.

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